A Closed Season to Save the Lions

The author of this article is the second son of the King of Sweden and has spent many of his thirty-five odd years in Africa. He is an enthusiastic zoologist and has made extensive contributions to British as well as Swedish museums. The present article was written after he had tramped 5,000 miles on foot through the least known parts of Africa.

By Prince William of Sweden.

IT is going to be an unhappy day—and one that may come very soon—for the sportsman and the nature lover when the king of jungle beasts is added to the already long list of extinct animals. Without its lions, Africa will lose much of the awe and majesty with which it is invested in the minds of most of us.

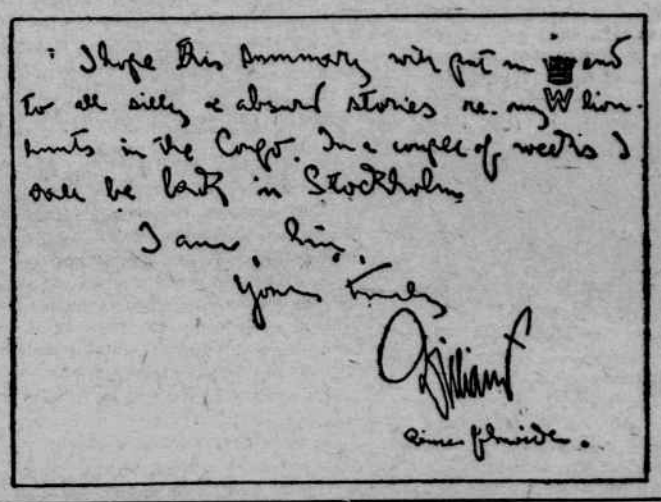
Yet, at the present rate of extermination, combined with other circumstances, I can foresee a day when the lion will be a jealously guarded denizen of zoological gardens; when the hunter will have to be content with going out after less important and less fearsome game. Then Africa's star ridden nights will be shorn of the greater part of their glamour and mystery and the jungle no longer will echo and reecho that sound which still fills the mind of even the most hardened hunter with fear and awe.

In the Congo lions provided us with a fair amount of sport, although they are rapidly decreasing in numbers. This is so apparent in some districts that, if I had my way, I should forthwith place a ban on shooting them for some time to come. It has been said that the plains around Lake Edward comprise Africa's richest hunting ground, but this is doubtful. During the war the black troops located there took an extremely heavy toll of game. Since then a great deal of hunting has been going on, with the result that lions, as well as other animals of the district—once a hunter's El Dorado—are not nearly so plentiful.

But while at some stages of the trip no lions could be found, in spite of the most diligent search, at others they proved to be still sufficiently numerous to cause alarm among neighboring tribes. Thus in one village, on the Ruindi Plain, the inhabitants begged us to organize a lion hunt and so rid them of the attentions of some of the more daring of the species. A few days before a girl of 15 had been so severely mauled by a lioness that she had died, and in view of this episode I agreed to help.

A shelter was built and zebra steaks temptingly displayed in front of it. Late that night no fewer than fifteen lions presented themselves as targets for our guns. Their leader, a thin but otherwise magnificent black maned male, was surrounded by his mates and their cubs. He fell to my first shot, while the rest stampeded toward our hiding place. One exceedingly fierce lioness made a determined rush at the barrel of my rifle, almost tearing the weapon from my hands, while the rest bounded past us into the jungle.

Half an hour later we were surprised to discover from the suppressed growls and crunching sounds that came to our ears, that some of the animals had returned to the bait, regardless of the danger that awaited them. The incident served to emphasize another aspect of the danger that threatens the lion. The beasts were starving, no doubt as a result of the diminution of smaller game, which has suffered in common with the larger kinds; and they returned again and again to the feast in spite of our shots, which resulted in the village being freed, at any rate for the time being, from their depredations.



As this letter testifies, Prince William is either modest or a stickler for the truth about his adventures.

Nevertheless, it is my earnest hope that some means will be found of enforcing protective measures in this and other districts. Otherwise man will have to answer for yet another crime against Nature—the crime of desecrating the last stronghold of her greatest wild beasts.

When we had explored the vast volcanic region that has for its hub the mysterious Mountains of the Moon, we turned our steps northward and started on what in some respects was the most interesting phase of our journey. It involved a long and at first seemingly endless tramp through the immense tropical forest belt that lies to the west of the Ruwenzori range, between Lakes Edward and Albert.

The forest is the haunt of the pygmy and of the okapi, of which extremely rare animal we did not succeed in obtaining a specimen, although we engaged the services of expert native trackers to help us in the search. But while we had no luck in this direction, we found some consolation in the fact that we traversed many little known parts of the forest and studied as many little known aspects of pygmy life.

Until within quite recent years the "little people" of the forest bore evil reputations as cannibals, among whom it was unsafe to venture without a very strong escort. Now, however, they are comparatively harmless, although it is not difficult to appreciate the fact that their savage instincts are concealed beneath only a thin veneer of respect for the white man.

Of a very low culture level, they live a lazy life in the forest clearings, where they build homes which, I verily believe, most domestic animals in civilized countries would disdain to occupy. Consisting simply of leaves covering hooped sticks, their queer little dwellings are lacking in every quality that makes for comfort.

Except for a rudely made knife and perhaps a bowl, used both for cooking and serving food, they have no household utensils of any kind. Their dietary consists almost exclusively of meat and wild honey, varied on somewhat rare occasions by sweet potatoes, and when game is scarce they go in danger of starving, for they have no knowledge of gardening or agriculture, and if they had they would probably be too lazy to apply it to good purposes.

As hunters, however, they have few equals among the world's primitive peoples. Thanks to their spare build and great natural ability, they are able to move through the forest at great speed, while they are marvelously dexterous with their bows and poisoned arrows, the only weapons they use. They get their poison from some obscure forest plant, and once it has been used it is rendered innocuous; hence meat that has been poisoned does them no harm in the eating.

Unlike the men of many other African tribes, the pygmy husband rarely allows himself the luxury of maintaining more than one wife, more than two being rarely if ever heard of. Likewise, his offspring seldom consists of more than two children, three being considered a big family and too great a responsibility for one father. The pygmy makes a tolerably good husband, too, but like some civilized husbands, he is not averse on occasions from administering corporal punishment, whenever he deems it deserved. Then he takes his erring spouse by the hair and beats her soundly with a big stick!

Ingersoll and the Bonanza

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collect $10, and under the glow of these great expectations would stand for a dinner that night to cost that sum at the very good French restaurant which we were seldom rich enough to patronize.

In spite of that good dinner I felt humiliated by my failure to tell on paper what I had seen and heard, and I already knew that a good reporter was expected to get his story to his paper if he had to kill some one to do so. Here was a sad start in work I liked and looked forward to with high hope. I think now that it was because he noted my discouragement that Mr. McCarthy, the kindest hearted editor I ever met, assigned me to report the hanging in Reno of a murderer whose crime had been followed by four years of recurring trial stories. He had been tried and convicted four times in as many different counties for an atrocious murder, and the last effort of his lawyer was an inquisition in insanity, a report of which had not been made the day before that set for the execution; nor had it been made when, with three or four other reporters, I went to the Reno jail the evening before. The Sheriff let us go to the condemned man's cell and we were there when he was told that the inquisitors had decided against him. He received this ominous announcement quietly. We soon discovered why; the man was incapable of entertaining the belief, the thought, that he was to be hanged. He had had four trials, heard himself declared guilty four times, yet there he was in good health enjoying the company of cheerful young men plentifully supplied with cigarettes. He? No! He was not doomed to die in a few hours.

There were not more than a dozen witnesses in the small jail yard but there was an excited crowd of hundreds of men just outside the walls when the Sheriff and a priest, with the condemned man between them, mounted to the gallows. The condemned walked quietly to the gallows edge, but then wildly shrieked. "You men outside! Hear me! Don't let them kill me! Save me, or they will murder me!"

The priest spoke quietly and he mumbled, "I ask forgiveness and I forgive my enemies," but then he shouted, "When I'm free this world won't be big enough to hold me and those who testified against me." Again and again he mumbled words after the priest, and again broke forth in threats, and shrieks for help.

I felt no revulsion even at the sight of the plunging body when at last the trap was sprung. This is mentioned as a fortunate temperamental trait, because within the following two or three years I was assigned to report six more executions by hanging each one expected to develop sensational features, as, indeed, all but one did. I have often wondered why, while yet a cub reporter, I should have been assigned to such stories in such numbers? Truly, it is not comfortable to try to worry out an answer to that question. It invited self doubt in those early years to be selected to cover stories which promised—as city editors regard such things—to provide especially frightful scenes. Did I seem callous, cruel, gross? I knew many fellow reporters who seemed tougher, more hardened than I. It may be well that we do not see "ourselves as others see us."

I shall refer now, so that I need not again, to two of those hanging assignments, telling of some of the uncruel incidents. At the only execution I reported in the San Francisco county jail I made a desk for my note paper on the back of the reporter standing in front of me. More than twenty years later I was one of the Representatives in Congress appointed on a committee to meet Woodrow Wilson when he came to Washington to be inaugurated President. Senators, Representatives, future Cabinet officers, Army and Navy officers, two score or so of us stood in a half circle in the Union Station special reception room. I had noticed that a man next to me had observed me with some interest, and presently he asked: "Are you not Ned Townsend?" I said I was. "I am Franklin Lane," he continued. "I haven't seen you since we reported a hanging together in San Francisco and you wrote your copy on my back." Mr. Lane was appointed Secretary of the Interior by President Wilson the next day.

I was sent to San Rafael, a suburb of San Francisco, to report the execution of a man half Indian, half Spaniard, who was suspected of having murdered and robbed several lone sportsmen fishing in a Marin county trout stream, and who had been convicted of one such murder. On the day before the hanging, after making my arrangements to sit up all night with the condemned man in his cell, my invariable practise on those assignments, I called on Ambrose Bierce, then the most conspicuous literary figure in California. Bierce and I chatted on the veranda of his San Rafael cottage for a time, and after he learned the nature of my assignment he invited me into his library. There he told me that he was a friend of the Sheriff; through him had become acquainted with the murderer; called on him, often carrying him cigarettes; gained his confidence, "and here is the result," Bierce concluded. He handed me a bunch of copy paper on which he had written the murderer's story, which bore this caption: A Go-as-You-Please Murderer.

It was the confession of either five or six murders, all cold blooded, always done to rob lone wanderers by stream or forest. "You may copy this—I shall not use it—and you need not tell how you came by it except to your city editor if he demands your source," Bierce said. I ran the story with my report and was promptly accused of having impersonated a priest to obtain it. I think I have never written this fact before, and do so now in the hope that it will be read by some of the old time reporters, who, in their soreness in being "called" for not turning in the confession with their reports of the execution, had accused me of masquerading as a priest. Well, nearly all newspaper scoops fall in by accident.

To return to Virginia City. One day in the *Chronicle* office Mr. McCarthy read a letter, smiling and threw it on his desk with a laugh, saying, "Frank Kenyon wants an editor for two papers he has started; one in Aurora, one in Bodie." The others in the office received this information with a like laugh, the cause of which I did not know. But I was excited by the remark. As soon as I could speak with Mr. McCarthy alone I asked him if I could not take the position his letter had referred to. He discouraged me at first. Aurora was an old mining camp revived; Bodie, a new camp, already had the reputation of being "bad." "Kenyon, Mr. McCarthy laughed, makes his living by starting papers in new mining camps to print the advertisements of mine locations filed in the United States Land Offices. You would find the life rough, the work hard." But I persuaded my editor that I was eager for just the conditions he described.

He wrote Kenyon about me, received an answer to send me along and the following afternoon I took stage in Carson City for my trip up the Sierra Nevada Mountains to edit and wholly to write two mining camp weekly newspapers.